



CHAPTER X.
MISS ELVIRA'S WAY AND THE COLONEL'S WAY.



"If you hit me, Col. Thorne," said Furnival.

The rain was down next morning; the sun shone upon Thorne Hill, and the mocking birds made a din in the garden thickets; the guinea fowls and the geese and all the denizens of the poultry yard kept up a cheerful clatter; only the human voice was mute or hushed to a disheartened whisper.

The colonel had his coffee early and rode away; Mrs. Thorne and Flora brokefasted in their own room; thus Miss Elvira and Miss were alone at table. Missy had lain awake an hour the night before, devising various plans in her poor little brain to induce her father to recall "Bert Nicholas," and one of these plans was deliberate starvation; but when morning came she was too hungry to carry out this project, so she ate a good breakfast, thinking to go without dinner.

Miss Elvira had made no resolution as to starving, but appetite had forsaken her, and having certain plans of her own that she was anxious to put in train, she sent Missy away when the meal was over. With a hundred dollars in gold hidden in her pocket, and a bottle of liniment carried conspicuously in her hand, Miss Elvira set out for old Gilbert's cabin. She could have sent for old Gilbert to come to her, but that would have given publicity to the step she contemplated. Lifting her dainty skirts with great painstaking, she tiptoed across the puddles in the lane through which old Gilbert had bravely splashed the dark night before, with Missy on his back. She was a little exhausted when she arrived at the end of her journey.

Old Gilbert was in his garden, where all things flourished greenly. To forestall the products of the "great-house garden" was one of the aims of his existence. "Gilbert! Gilbert!" Miss Elvira called faintly; she was leaning over the gate, which she found hard to open.

"Dat pesky gate agin!" exclaimed old Gilbert, hastening forward. "Hopes I see you well dis mornin', Missie-virey." "I am very well, thank you, Gilbert," Miss Elvira answered bravely. She had not slept all night, and she looked old and ill, as Gilbert plainly saw.

"Sedown here, Missie-virey, in de shade of dese panmy-chivies," he said, wiping with his sleeve the rude block that did duty for a bench.

Miss Elvira sat down, glad to rest. "How is your rheumatism, Gilbert?" she asked, with gentle interest.

Old Gilbert made a wry face; his rheumatism was none the better for his tramp in the rain; it was promptly the cause for Miss Elvira's sympathy. "Hit kinder—gits me wid a stitch—in de holder of de back—now en'agin," he said, with expressive jerks and pauses.

"I've brought you a liniment that is considered very efficacious," said Miss Elvira, in her soft, plaintive voice and choice language, as she offered the big black bottle. Miss Elvira would no more have gone to old Gilbert's cabin without her "free will offering" than old Gilbert would have gone to the "great house" without his little complement of eggs or vegetables, or the liniment.

The old man took the bottle with a smile of supreme satisfaction; he loved "doctorments." Pulling out the stopper with his teeth, and smelling the contents with a critical air, "Hit got a strength, tubbe shol!" he declared, approvingly.

"Thank, ma'am; thank, Missie-virey. I gwan give 'em a trial."

Miss Elvira's eyes meantime traveled slowly round the little garden, as if in search of something. She missed Nicholas in everything she saw. "I suppose you've heard what has happened, Gilbert?" she said, with a tremor in her voice.

"Yes, Missie-virey," old Gilbert sighed, and hung his head.

Thus Col. Thorne had had his way; yet, in spite of it, he felt beaten, and he rode homeward, moody and bitter, with a dejected head.

CHAPTER XI. MISS ROXANNA MAKES UP HER MIND.



"Land alive! Nick Thorne!"

With the hot blood of the Thornes surging in his veins, Nicholas left his father's house, reckless of the driving rain; and when the rain ceased, at dawn, he had come to that sorry little unpainted house, in the corner of the field, on the edge of Eden, his horse flecked with foam, himself drenched with the storm.

A bird was singing in the blooming elder bush that grew near one of the windows; it was Dossia's window, that looked toward Leon county. There were no blinds, and presently the white curtains were drawn aside and Dossia appeared; the small, square, high set window framed her like an old-fashioned portrait. Well might the carpenter boast of his daughter's beauty! It was of a type that needed no adorning; and Dossia, as she stood in the window, was none the less an exquisite picture that her black dress was so severely simple. Her luxuriant dark hair clustered in little rings over her low, fair forehead and around her shoulders, a graceful riot of curls. There was a smile, wistful and tender, on her perfect mouth, and a far away look in her splendid eyes, that ignored the near surroundings and pierced the distance with the soul's vision.

Dossia sat silent and stunned, clinging to the arm of herself; it did not matter; but for Nicholas—it seemed at the moment more than she could bear.

"My whole fortune," said Nicholas, with covert bitterness, "consists in my horse and my watch; we'll sell these, Dossia, and defy the world."

"I have done you a great wrong," she whispered.

"You've done yourself a great wrong, it may be, dear heart," said Nicholas. "But at least we have each other. Oh, Dossia! Dossia! my wife! If they only knew you, Dossia, my saint! There is nobody like you. You had faith in me, and you saved me. Compared with you, what are they all? Henceforth I live only for you, Missy, Missy alone!" he faltered.

"Poor little sister! she has not cast me off! How she cried to me, through the rainy darkness, to take her with me! I seemed to hear her every mile of the way! I'm an exile from home, and all that, you know. Ah, no, no!" he heaved, quickly, as Dossia sobbed aloud. "How could I say that, my dearest and best? You are my home. Dossia, Dossia, look at me with your heavenly eyes; say you love me; say you believe in me!"

And Dossia looked at him. She did not speak, but she smiled through her tears; and then she drew away from him and rose.

"You are going to pray over the 'situation,' Dossia, you know you are; my beautiful saint!" cried Nicholas, with a smile of reverent admiration.

"I am going to find you some of my father's clothes," said Dossia.

"Good wife! You are better than any fortune," Nicholas declared; and he laughed. He was very happy, in spite of the "situation."

Miss White had finished sweeping and left the porch. She had no grace of manner, but she was by no means devoid of grace of heart. That this marriage was a wretched business, a miserable blunder, was an opinion far more than she could utter; but she was not to be deterred by that; she was to be married, and she was to be married.

Roxanna, according to her wont, was up betimes this morning, and having browbeaten the hired negro who did the cooking, she bounced out of the front door, broom in hand, to sweep the front porch, just as Nicholas Thorne came up the steps.

A tall, strong, gaunt woman was Roxanna, in whom hard work and menage fare had left scarce a trace of the luxuriant beauty that had distinguished her youth. In her dress, narrow and short, there was no effort at adornment. "Them as likes may put in their eight or nine breadths," Miss Roxanna was accustomed to say; "but four is plenty for any mortal woman, an' no convenient to pocket an' becklebone. No ruffles, no tucks, no manner of superfluities for her. Her only vanity was her hair, which still retained its color and its gloss. She had tied a towel over her head to protect it from the dust; but truly the dust might hardly reach her head, so high it was above her broom.

Now, Miss Roxanna White had never approved of the admiration Nicholas evinced for Dossia. She was decidedly of the opinion that it would never do to have this young sprig of quality hanging around a girl whose mother was dead, and whose father was away. She would have liked to sweep Col. Thorne's son off the porch, with the two or three leaves she espied upon the floor; but as she could not do this, she towered in the doorway, and held her broom crosswise, as she exclaimed, forbiddingly: "Land alive! Nick Thorne! What brings you here this time o' day, beto' even the cows is milked?" And to herself she thought, "I've writ that out o' k'ins a warnin'; why ain't she fitten to keep him home?"

she had been sent to visit a relation six miles distant, just two days before Mrs. Furnival died. "Wha—what?" she gasped. Then, under strong conviction, she lifted her right arm straight—it nearly touched the lintel—and said, with strong emphasis, "I'll bet my ultimate piety the colonel ain't consentin'."

"Never you mind the colonel," said Nicholas, shortly. "I must see Dossia."

Dossia had heard his voice; she came out into the little entry that divided the rooms, and stood there, pale and trembling.

"Dossia! Dossia!" cried Nicholas, wildly, as he pushed past the demoralized spinster; and the next instant she was in his arms.

"Dossia," said Miss White, hoarsely, "you're a cawnsistent member of the Methodist chu'ch, an' so far fo'ith ez I know, you ain't had naire a fall from grace; ez you say hit's true that ye ar married, ez he tells—beside Cousin Mandy's bed o' death—I'll believe it."

"It is true," said Dossia, with smiles and tears and blushes.

Miss White picked up her broom and went to sweeping off the porch. She made two comments mentally, one in reference to Dossia's mother, the other to Dossia's father: "She must a turned plum' foot tofe, I see."

Nicholas and Dossia sat down on the long wooden bench that constituted the only furnishing of the little passage. Miss White, glancing over her shoulder, saw them there, and she immediately slammed the front door.

"You've been in the rain," said Dossia, hiccoughed all her life to consider others. "How wet your clothes are! You must have ridden all night."

"I did," Nicholas answered, with a dark frown; then, with a burst of bitter laughter: "Have you any clothes, Dossia? I don't know that I have any, unless I've left a few scattering about Sunrise plantation that I may lay claim to."

"Your father has?"—Dossia faltered.

"My father has?"—responded Nicholas, indicating with a wave of his hand that words would not express the sentence passed upon him.

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heavy covered basket, under the weight of which she could hardly stagger.

"I've brought you your pass, Gilbert," she panted; "and some provisions. You are to return to-morrow and bring word, you know. Be sure you put some provender in the cart for the ox." That one of the Thorne Hill oxen should be fed from the Furnival corn crib was ignominious not to be endured.

"I gwan do dat!" old Gilbert assured her. He held the same views that Miss Elvira held in regard to the feeding of the Thorne Hill oxen; and furthermore, he thought, "Is I gwan risk old Brandy on mouly nubbins?"

"And, Gilbert," said Miss Elvira, coming back after she had started away, as if what she had to say was an afterthought and not a deliberately premeditated design, "if Nicholas should take a fancy to anything in the basket, you needn't bring back the jars."

"Yes, ma'am," said old Gilbert, with stolid gravity, but he doubled over with a smothered chuckle when Miss Elvira was gone. "Is she clean plum' forgot Mawse Nick is a bawn Thorne! He ain't gwan tetch dat basket; but I gwan haul it jes' de same."

Now Missy, hidden in the clump of Palma Christi that ornamented the front of old Gilbert's garden, had heard the whole of the conference between these two. When it was concluded she crept out and hurried to the house, over the garden fence, fired with the wild resolve to run away with old Gilbert and join her brother. She made up a small bundle of her clothing and hid it under the wardrobe, and when she went down to tea she secreted a biscuit by way of provision for her breakfast. Her next idea was to lie awake all night in order to rise with the dawn on the morrow, to which end she insisted upon hearing Glory-Ann's whole repertoire of zoological legends; but in spite of this, Missy slept the sleep of a tired child. When she awoke the glimmer of the dawn was in the east and Glory-Ann was snoring on her pallet.

Missy sprang up. She had to dress herself, which she never yet had done. It was an arduous undertaking, but at last it was accomplished. Her shoes and stockings she took in her hands, with her little bundle, and stole softly and swiftly down stairs. As she could not unlock the hall door, she climbed out of one of the dining room windows, and ran down the lane to old Gilbert's cabin. Alack! it was shut fast, and the ox cart was not under the shed.

When Missy comprehended that old Gilbert was gone, she threw herself on the ground with a scream of rage and disappointment; but presently she reflected that if this attempt at flight should be discovered, every possible means would be taken to prevent her putting her intention into execution on any future occasion that might offer; perhaps even she might be locked up and fed on bread and water, like a little girl in a story she had read; and however decided Missy might be as to dying of starvation, she had no mind to lie on bread and water; so she made haste back to the house, and was lucky to get in unseen.

Glory-Ann was still snoring, and Missy stuffed her bundle under the wardrobe again, tore off her clothes, and curled herself up in bed.

It was a mystery to her how she was never able to explain how Missy's clothes came to be scattered all over the room; but she had her suspicions, when, a few hours later, she discovered the bundle under the wardrobe.

"Who in de lan' put dis here?" she inquired.

"Me," said Missy.

"What fur, I lak ter know?"

"Cause," and no coaxing could make Missy say further.

Meanwhile old Gilbert pursued his journey sadly. Once in the silent woods he essayed to sing, for his comfort:

"I'm a trav'lin' on de homely road; but he ended with a sigh, and drove on, mope."

Toward sundown Miss Roxanna White, sitting on the top step of the porch, and enjoying her evening "dip" in solitude, espied the ox cart coming along the road. In that primitive and secluded hamlet the passage of an ox cart was an exciting event. Miss White watched it with an interest that was almost breathless. It seemed too good to be true that this very respectable old negro driver, was actually going to stop before the house where, for the time being, she had her abiding place.

"Whose ole nigger are you?" she demanded, in shrill excitement, as Gilbert dismounted.

out cousin won't mend it none, an' you kin tell Colonel Thorne I soso."

"Dullah, mistah!" said old Gilbert, with uplifted hand. "I wouldn't so much ez name Mawse Nick to mawster—not fur freedom!"

Miss White cackled harshly.

Gilbert, recalling Miss Elvira's instructions as to the contents of the provision basket, thought that it might be well to make a propitiatory offering to this severe giantess, who seemed somehow to be linked with his young master's fate.

"Dey is a little matter o' goodies out yander in de cart," he said, with hesitating humility; "mebbe you mought lak ter tak 'em."

Miss White spat viciously. "No, thankse," said she. "They'd sour on my stomick."

"You mought set 'em aside ontel Mawse Nick come back," old Gilbert suggested, timidly.

"He ain't a-comin' back!" Miss White declared, with decision so energetic that old Gilbert's heart sank with the fear that his young master was turned out of doors on all sides. "Ez I see a-counin' on old Mawse Job Furnival ter tek care on him," thought the old negro, sadly, as he stood twirling his hat, and casting furtive glances at the inexorable Amazon on the doorstep; but Miss White had said her say, and was silent.

At last he turned to go. "I wish you well, ma'am," he said; "en' I'm bleeged ter you."

"You're welcome," said Roxanna. "Though what you got to be thankin' me is mo'n I kin see."

"Never!" shouted the colonel.

Silence and gloom had settled upon Thorne Hill. Tom Quash no longer picked the banjo in his moments of idleness; Griffin Jim rattled the bones no more when work was done; Amy ceased her capering to the tinkling of the pious fiddle, and the talk in the kitchen was hushed; it was as if Mawse Nicholas had died. Mrs. Leonard and Miss Elvira instinctively shunned each other; Flora forsook the piano, and Missy sat in corners; but the colonel held his head higher than ever, hiding his mortification under a cloak of pride and silence that forbade sympathy.

No one named Nicholas; even Missy, though her heart clamored for her brother, found her tongue refuse its office in presence of her stern father. The child understood intuitively something of the fierce tumult that raged in the colonel's breast. A great awe, not of her father, but of what he suffered, took possession of her, and compelled her to silence; but her sole object in life now was to follow her brother. To Missy this seemed an easy undertaking if she could only get away from Thorne Hill; but she was afraid to venture alone any further than the big gate at the end of the avenue. Here she sat gazing wistfully through the bars, and hating herself for cowardice, on the morning of the day that old Gilbert was returning from his bootless errand, here had she been over since breakfast, and she was now nearly eleven o'clock; but she had not yet made up her mind to venture outside, when she espied a carriage coming along the road. This sight created a sudden diversion in Missy's bitter thoughts.

"It's Cousin Myrtilla!" she exclaimed aloud. "She's brought Lottie and Bess!"

A vision of wild frolic down by the spring riveted in Missy's train, as she jumped to open the gate, but when the carriage passed through only Cousin Myrtilla looked from the window.

"You didn't bring Lottie and Bess?" cried Missy, in deep reproach.

"Well, no, I didn't," said Mrs. Henry. "Came off in such a sweet. Never mind, bring 'em next time. Open the door, Larkin," she commanded the driver, "and let me take this child in."

Missy made no objection. She was fond of her Cousin Myrtilla, and she admired that lady's showy dress. Such beautiful pink erasies within the bonnet, and trim that framed the faded old face, such lovely yellow roses outside, such a bewitching like organdie, white lace, multicolored puffs and frills, and those purple paws! How Missy wished for a pair just like them! But these puffs and vanities soon palled, and Missy's thoughts reverted to her trouble. "Bert Nicholas is gone away," she said abruptly. "He's married to Dossia, Furnival, and he can't never come home no mo'." And Missy began to cry.

about him. I've a message for my cousin, the colonel."

"Oh," stammered Miss Elvira: "if it's about Nicholas, I'm afraid!"

"It is about Nicholas, and I am not a bit afraid," Mrs. Henry declared, stoutly. "You miserable coward, Elvira; just because Jasper Thorne has heavy eyebrows and a high and mighty air, you don't dare hold an independent opinion. Go, call your brother; I have that to say to him it is best he should hear."

Miss Elvira obeyed; that is, she sent Missy to tell Glory-Ann to tell Griffin Jim to tell Tom Quash to hunt up the colonel, and bear him the information that Mrs. Henry wished to see him.

The colonel made no delay in answering the summons, but he was very ceremonious in his greeting; he overdid everything now in his desire to appear unmoved.

"My brother, however, had not known him so many years to be easily deceived. 'It will kill him,' she said to herself, 'unless he can be persuaded to reconciliation.' Then she spoke out:

"Cousin Jasper, there's no need for pretension between you and me. I'm older than you are, and I've seen trouble—with a son of my own. It is best to look things squarely in the face. Nicholas has made an unfortunate marriage, but—"

"Madam!" said the colonel, in a deep and angry voice, with a hand uplifted in protest. His face had turned a ghastly pallor that made his black brows look blacker than ever, underneath which his eyes gleamed like lightning.

"Missy, who had refused to be sent away, sat gazing at him, fascinated; and Miss Elvira shrank visibly; but Mrs. Henry never faltered. 'Dossia will make him a good wife,' she proceeded, in a calm and even voice; 'she would make you a good daughter, if—'

"Never!" shouted the colonel. He seemed to wish to say more, but speech failed him.

"None of us, indeed, would have chosen her for Nicholas," Mrs. Henry continued; "but she is a good girl, and all this is something for you to consider and be thankful for. Life has more remunerative work to offer than nursing a wrong, and Nicholas isn't alone to blame."

"Will you oblige me," the colonel interrupted coldly, "by talking of something else?"

"No," said Mrs. Henry, with heat; "I've nothing else to talk of, and I've you now to say. Nicholas is at my house. I will receive no embassy," the colonel declared.

"Don't you know your own flesh and blood better than that?" exclaimed Mrs. Henry, impatiently. "Nick is a Thorne, every inch of him. He'll make no overtures. He has married the girl he loves, and he is immensely happy, poor fool; but—he is desperately ill."

Miss Elvira clasped her hands, but uttered no sound.

"He is desperately ill," Mrs. Henry repeated. "He rode all night in the rain and exposure, fatigue and excitement have told on him. Nicholas is very ill."

Missy burst out crying. "I want to go home with Cousin Myrtilla," she wailed. "Except for this there was a dead silence. The colonel thought his son's illness a ruse. 'That man, or that woman,' said he, after a long pause, 'who harbors him is no friend of mine.'"

"As you please," said Mrs. Henry, rising. "He is your only son; you cannot take away his name, nor his blood. And as for me—I can get on without you, Col. Thorne. My house is my own, and I'll entertain whom I see fit." She was thoroughly angry now. "If your brother did but know it, turning to Miss Elvira, 'the only thing to do now is to forgive Nick's marriage. Let him try the other way that's all. But he ought to remember that he is not blameless himself. He has always worked wrong with poor Nick, keeping him at a frowning distance, when he ought to have cradled him close; banishing him to the Sunrise plantation, when he ought to have had him here at home. Isn't Nicholas that alone to blame?"

But the colonel did not hear all this; he had left the room in great wrath, and Mrs. Henry, overcome by indignant sorrow, and vexed at her defeat, declared that she would not remain a moment longer.

"I am going back to that poor boy," she said. "You may call it a weakness, if you like, but thankful am I that I forgive my son. I've gotten more good out of that, Elvira, than ever you'll get out of Bishop Ken."

And Mrs. Henry departed.

Missy, at least, had derived some comfort from this visit, to know that her brother was at Cousin Myrtilla's; was to feel him near—within reach. Though she did not, he need not die, and some day she could go to see Lottie and Bess—and, once there, what could hinder her staying forever with her Nicholas?

But alas for this cheering hope! the colonel returned to the parlor when Mrs. Henry's carriage had disappeared, and said, sternly:

"Elvira, you will oblige me by ceasing from this time forth to hold any communication whatever with Mrs. Henry and any of her family. For myself I will never cross her threshold again, save in case of some calamity."

And that meant I am not to play with Lottie and Bess any more," wailed Missy. The colonel sighed bitterly. He felt himself a deeply injured man. He was a remotely sorry for Missy's childish playfulness, but what was that compared with his anguish? Yet nobody realized his position, nobody considered his wounded dignity.

To be Continued.

Overboard at the Capital.

It is odd how standards of criticism differ. A young man who was inspecting the signatures to the Declaration of Independence that hangs in the state department was heard to remark:

"Humph! If I had been some of these fellows, and couldn't write any better, I'd have gone to a business college—Washington Post.

An Anecdote.

Cedric's mother was a New Yorker, but Cedric himself was born in Boston.

"Cedric, you are a naughty boy; you want a flogging," said she.

"No, mother," returned the child, bravely. "I may need chastisement, but I do not want it."—Harper's Bazar.

An Inquiry.

"Mamma, what Miss Gilbert, I have noticed a peculiar ring in Herbert's voice when he speaks to me."

"Indeed! Observe carefully and see whether it bears any resemblance to an engagement ring?"—Washington Post.

CHAPTER XII. COMPLIMENTS PASS.



And while Missy and swiftly down stairs, it was Miss Elvira's wish that Gilbert should depart on his mission without the knowledge of the rest of the world at Thorne Hill; therefore she herself took him his "pass" in the dark of the evening, stealing out of the house with a